

PATENT
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United States Letters Patent*

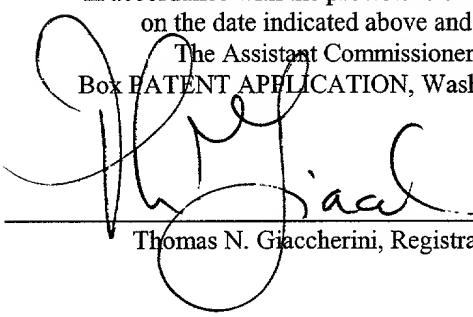
Sponsorship Management System

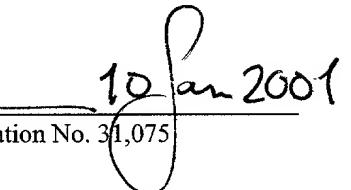
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Sponsorship Management System

INTRODUCTION

The title of this Patent Application is *Sponsorship Management System*. The Applicant, Michael J. Munson of 10610 Stokes Avenue, Cupertino, California 95014, is a citizen of the United States of America.

FEDERALLY SPONSORED RESEARCH OR DEVELOPMENT

None.

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The present invention pertains to methods and apparatus for providing an integrated management tool for the sponsorship industry. More specifically, the present invention offers an innovative web-based, browser-driven facility for defining a new market and transaction mechanism for corporations seeking to promote their products and services, and for the proprietors of events seeking corporate sponsors.

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BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Corporations spend hundreds of billions of dollars annually to promote their products and services to their customers. Many large U.S. companies spend tens of billions of dollars every year to market their wares. In addition to the advertising campaigns that are broadcast to consumers via television, radio, the Internet and print media, corporations devote many marketing dollars to the "sponsorship" of a wide variety of "events." A sponsored event may be any athletic competition, concert, artistic performance, festival or any other occasion that is designed to attract the attendance, participation or interest of consumers of the products and services of the sponsor of the event. These events may be annual or periodic occurrence, or may be limited to a single occasion. The events are organized and administered by "property owners," many of whom are professional entities whose sole purpose is to stage an annual event. The World SeriesSM, the SuperbowlSM, the Rose ParadeSM and the Indianapolis 500SM are all famous examples of annual events which are run by property owners, and which all enjoy the benefits of corporate sponsorship.

Despite the enormous size of this yearly expenditure, companies that seek to advertise their products by sponsoring events utilize a rather haphazard process for accomplishing their objectives. Two previous services, the IEG NetworkSM and LitLamp.comSM provide listing of some information about sponsored events. At the present time, however, no widely available, integrated database and electronic marketplace is currently operating to provide comprehensive information, and then to match buyers and sellers of sponsored events. The development of a new

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marketplace with customized interfaces for buyers and sellers of sponsored events would constitute a major technological advance, and would satisfy long felt needs and aspirations in the advertising and marketing industries.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention comprises methods and apparatus for creating a common platform and single point showcase for players in the event sponsorship arena. One embodiment of the present invention enables buyers and sellers of sponsored events to browse a multiple listing service of events using a website. The website may also 5 be used to conduct searches, and save search results using a feature called the “Property WizardSM.” Although the Internet is the preferred distribution mechanism for the present invention, the invention may be disseminated to users using any public or private network, or by the distribution of discrete storage devices like compact discs.

10 In another embodiment of the invention, buyers may submit requests for proposals (RFPs) for events that they wish to sponsor using an “RFP WizardSM,” that allows them to maintain anonymity if they choose. Sellers are able to peruse RFPs using a “Proposal ViewerSM.” Both parties may obtain additional information through the website. Events may be characterized and searched using descriptive 15 icons, dates, budgets, demographics, keywords or by other characteristics. Sellers may respond to the RFPs, and, ultimately, use the website to consummate and record transactions.

Yet another embodiment of the invention allows users to inspect discounted properties in a section called “Wise BuysSM.”

20 Corporate sponsors may utilize a “Corporate Management Tool,” which allows corporate users to organize and employ information about sponsored events via a geographic map with links to currently held sponsorship rights.

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An appreciation of the other aims and objectives of the present invention and a more complete and comprehensive understanding of this invention may be obtained by studying the following description of a preferred embodiment, and by referring to the accompanying drawings.

A BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Figures 1 through 48 present “screen shots” that portray the image generated for a computer screen for one embodiment of the invention. Figures 49 and 50 are flowcharts exhibiting one of the methods of the invention.

5 Figure 1 presents a view of a home page.

Figures 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 supply views of the screens that enable the user registration process.

Figure 7 is a “login” screen.

10 Figure 8 is an example of a screen that enables a seller to find an anonymous request for proposal (RFP) from a buyer, and to provide a response.

Figures 9, 10, 11 and 12 depicts information about the RFP.

Figures 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19 and 20 are screen shots related to the “Proposal WizardSM,” and contain information about the proposals listed on the website.

15 Figures 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26 and 27 exhibit a series of screens, including a “Proposal ViewerSM,” that supply information to a buyer who provided an RFP. These screens present information concerning a reply to the buyer.

20 Figures 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, and 41 offer a sequence of displays which enable a user to perform a search, and then save the search results.

Figure 42 portrays a screen that notifies sellers about “soon-to-expire” inventory.

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Figure 43 concerns a feature of the website which allows sellers to maximize their exposure to buyers, including a feature called "Wise BuysSM," which presents discounted properties.

5 Figure 44 portrays a screen which gives users the opportunity to see all categories of listed properties.

Figure 45 is a screen shot related to the Wise Buys feature.

Figures 46, 47, and 48 depict a Corporate Management Tool, which allows corporate users to organize and utilize information about sponsored events.

10 Figures 49 and 50 are flowcharts that illustrate one embodiment of the RFP process.

**A DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF PREFERRED
& ALTERNATIVE EMBODIMENTS**

I. Overview of the Invention

The present invention offers a revolutionary new marketplace for the sponsorship industry. In one embodiment of the invention, a website available to users via the Internet provides a comprehensive source of information about events, event managers and event sponsors. Users who visit this website, Sponsorwise.comSM are able to browse a database which serves as a multiple listing service for the sponsorship industry. The website also includes a search facility for retrieving specific information.

Buyers seeking events to sponsor are able to place requests for proposals (RFPs) on the website. Sellers are able to view the proposals, obtain additional information, submit a response and consummate a purchase using a variety of screens generated to facilitate the RFP process.

A corporate sponsor may organize selected data in a customized page called a "Corporate Management Tool."

Site visitors may analyze the listing using a variety of pictographic icons, and are also invited to consider a special, discounted listings using a feature called "Wise BuysSM."

II. A Preferred Embodiment of the Invention

Figure 1 is a “screen shot” of the home page of a website, SponsorwiseSM.com. The screen shots that are presented in the Drawings are printed representations of the images that are displayed as various pages of one current embodiment of the SponsorwiseSM.com. These screen shots are intended to disclose the present invention, but should be considered as illustrations of one of many conceivable embodiments, alternatives and equivalents.

Figure 1 shows the SponsorwiseSM logo, and invites a person viewing the website to register, take a tour or inspect a property listing called “WiseBuysSM. If the user wishes to register, he or she is prompted by the screens depicted in Figures 2 through 6 to supply a profile of information to the website. By registering, a user selects a user name and a password, and then becomes a subscriber. In one embodiment of the invention, users who become subscribers pay a subscription fee.

Once a user is a subscriber, he or she is allowed to enter the generally restricted pages of the website that are reserved for subscribers. Buttons displayed across the top of the screen allow a subscriber to view his or her customized pages as shown in Figure 8, by clicking “My Sponsorwise.” Buttons for browsing and searching functions are also provided, as well as an “About Us” button which leads to page of information describing the company. The banners and photos located at the center of the screen depict events which are available for a sponsor. An “Industry News” box is also supplied to offer news items that are pertinent to the sponsorship industry. The left side of the screen enable three courses of action, and are represented by the large buttons in the darkly shaded column:

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Create a Property
Wise Promotions
Consulting Services

5 Each of these choices takes the subscriber to a different page which contains information of interest to buyers and sellers of sponsored events.

10 Figure 8 reveals a page in which a seller finds, and then responds, to a proposal submitted by a buyer. The lower portion of this screen relates to the notification feature, including the RFP process, which is depicted in detail in Figures 9 through 12. A buyer, who may remain anonymous, may submit an RFP to SponsorwiseSM by furnishing information about an sponsorship opportunity by filling in the fields in the screens generated by the website. These screens help build a description of a buyer's request, and include information about timing, the desired audience, budget, location and buyer preferences. Once this RFP information is submitted to the SponsorwiseSM database, it is matched to properties. When the database finds a match between an RFP and a property, then, and only then, is the property owner notified of an RFP. The only way for the seller to reply to the RFP if the buyer is anonymous is for a seller to click the button labeled "REPLY TO THIS RFP."

15

20 Figures 13 through 20 show the next step in the process, the "Proposal Wizard." These facilities enable a buyer to build a proposal that will be submitted to SponsorwiseSM, and then displayed to potential sellers (event managers). Figure 13 exhibits a seller's contact information. As shown in Figure 14, the Proposal Wizard allows a buyer to upload new documents, and to maintain a personal filing cabinet of

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information that is conveniently stored on the website. Individual documents may be added to a proposal using the fields depicted in Figures 15, 16 and 17. Figure 18 reports an account balance for a subscriber, and also allows the subscriber to purchase additional SponsorwiseSM credits. Figure 19 is a screen shot which shows how an

5 RFP is reviewed by a potential respondent.

Figure 21 reveals the details of how a buyer who previously submitted an RFP views a reply to his or her RFP. This information is furnished in the section of the screen labeled "Notification." Figure 22 invites the user to click to view a property listing, which is described in detail in Figures 23 through 27.

10 Figure 28 is a screen shot which shows how a user employs the search function. After search results are obtained, they may be saved in the website in a page that is customized for and is only accessible to a particular user.

15 Figure 29 pertains to "key characteristics" of property listings. Figure 30 shows how features or attributes of an event may be displayed using icons or pictographs. For example the top row under "Festivals/Events" shows an open book, which serves as a symbol for an educational event. A star represents "celebrity potential." A flag waving smartly from a staff connotes a patriotic event which appeals to "civic pride." Figures 31 through 34 supply additional information about advanced searching, and saving search results.

20 Figure 35 is a page from the SponsorwiseSM website which identifies a search identified as "Summer Family Activity." Figures 36 through 41 portray a particular event, California League BaseballSM, that was reported as an event which falls within the category Summer Family Activity. A wide variety of information about this event

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is contained in Figures 36 through 41, including a small screen which enables viewers to watch a video about California League BaseballSM.

Figure 42 describes another feature of the invention, which pertains to “soon-to-expire” inventory. The “Wise Promo WizardSM,” is pictured in Figure 43. This feature includes a listing of discounted events which is called “Wise BuysSM.”

5 Figures 44 and 45 illustrate a screen which allows users to view all categories of the SponsorwiseSM database, including unsold inventories.

10 Figure 46 presents a feature of the invention that may prove especially valuable for persons within advertising or marketing departments of corporations. This screen shot depicts the “Corporate Management Tool,” which allows personnel within a company that seeks events to sponsor to efficiently organize, track and use information about their sponsorship efforts. Figure 47 includes a map which organizes sponsored events geographically, while Figure 48 lists events located in a particular region.

15 Figures 49 and 50 are flowcharts which illustrate the method of the invention concerning the RFP process.

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APPENDICES

This Specification includes two Appendices, identified as "A" and "B," which contain more detailed information concerning various embodiments of the present invention. Appendix A, which follows the *Abstract of the Disclosure and Sequence Listing*, contains pages A-1 through A-13. Appendix B, which follows Appendix A, contains pages B-1 through B-11. Both of these Appendices are intended to form part 5 of the disclosure of the present invention.

CONCLUSION

Although the present invention has been described in detail with reference to one or more preferred embodiments, persons possessing ordinary skill in the art to which this invention pertains will appreciate that various modifications and enhancements may be made without departing from the spirit and scope of the Claims 5 that follow. The various alternatives for implementing the invention that have been disclosed above are intended to educate the reader about preferred embodiments of the invention, and are not intended to constrain the limits of the invention or the scope of Claims.